

Editorial

(The Fifth Column)



(The Editor - slippery character! - will here attempt to shift the vantage point to film to see how and if the dark, murky old Leviathan herself has been displaced.)

It is probably obvious to you (but it has always been a source of frustration to me) that film, a narrative which appears to most clearly resemble a person's sight (and more about this later) can never assume a strictly first person point of view as an ordinary story in print can. The immediacy of film, is of course, illusory; the camera is really an object-ive voyeur, closer to a 'fourth wall' (as in the early closed-frame productions) than a hidden eye, a type of architectural witness, which like wallpaper can absorb events.

Film, like any other art is a convention, and every convention has its limits. One of these limits for film is the frame. *Frame* is linked to the preposition *from*, meaning 'in front of' or 'forward'. To frame is to bracket, to articulate something distinct from its adjacent situation; the frame sits 'in front of' the object of attention, and also 'before' it. In this sense, framing is an essential dimension of all the photographic arts. By bracketing the objects of everyday life from the larger visual field, the camera (like a window) unveils a transcendent meaning not obvious when unframed.

When the camera is fixed (and motion takes place through action) film would most seem to resemble theatre, its progenitor. The proscenium, a type of 'frame' which appeared late in theatre, becomes the movie screen, a flat picture plane onto which all the layers of action are fused. Like the proscenium, the screen at once establishes a dividing line between the world and its representation, and affords a 'cut' into the action. Yet, unlike the theatre, which unifies the audience and cast in a single, symbiotic event, the screen posits an actual cleft in time and place, altering the traditional reciprocity between spectator and spectacle.

Perhaps film could best be described as a section, a cut similar to the sectional model of the Renaissance, which like magic opens up the unseeable, revealing a profile only an ethereal presence could discern. Whether the camera is still or not, film is like a section in the way it cuts through chronological time, across the so-called actual time of events. Sometimes film very literally cuts through walls and windows, or through walls and time at once (Bergman: *Face to Face*). Sometimes, it seems, the film transcends the proscenium when it pans the action in a circular or a spiralling motion and closes the space of the film back in upon itself (Stelling: *The Illusionist*). Then it is even possible to imagine that the screen is not a stationary plane, but a hinge or joint that sweeps the not-so-

stationary audience into its motion. One could even envision that the real space of the theatre is to be found in the sealed-up darkness of the camera itself (and is here to be found the last refuge of public space?); that the rake of seats, upside down, faces the negative of the real event, the negative onto which the lens gathers and inverts the necessary stream of light.

It is no coincidence, then, that although as light-tight as a darkroom a cinema is, most of us wait until the night to see our films; we are most light sensitive, most vulnerable on the underside of the day's cycle. An ephemeral flicker of light, this is what we throng to see; no wonder Bergman so revered the little arc-light! For, to what other mediation, except perhaps the stained-glass window, is the transmission of light through a translucent membrane so vital to its elucidation? The cathedral's darkness sanctified the coloured drops of light that trickled across its stony walls, charting the sun's daily course through the City of God. The film's source, however, is fixed relative to the viewing room; only the little wrigglers of colour and shade transform as they march across the screen.

Film as an Old English word, not only meant *membrane*, *skin*, *lamina*, or even *emanation*, but also *filament* or *thread*. Film is most literally a spool of thread, a sort of Ariadne's string by means of which a labyrinthine tale unwinds. In this sense, it could be said that film is architecture's complement, for the film's world need not conform to geometric totalities in the order of *extensa*; rather, film is indeed more coherent, more true to life when these very orders are stretched to their utter limits and even beyond. Film is architecture unravelled, the labyrinth outstretched according to different rules; it is the other side of geometry, the motion of its circumscription. Architecture's unravelling thus requires an acute awareness of a different sort, that of experience and perception. The filmmaker, with a dull insensate instrument which merely records light and sound, cannot hope to reproduce perception, but only a meager distortion. The filmmaker, like the Magus, must perfect the art of illusion, i.e. the very *techne* of film, which an architect would do well to heed.

Film is not sight; it may even be its opposite. Film provides a disembodied view, an 'extraneous interiority', which, however paradoxical it may seem, is far from difficult to access. But the limits of the frame are not the limits of our gaze. Even the open frame or the revolving camera shots are purely frontal; they cannot duplicate the embodied awareness of a continuous sensual field. This is why it could be said that film is most like a section; it omits 'the other half', the body's unseen side. Film is after all, an image; it possesses its limitations and possibilities. Architecture cannot be reduced to or replaced by film, but as with the drawn image, there is the potential to project an architecture of film.

It may be best to consider the screen, or even better, its downscaled and inverted original, the negative, when discussing film as an image. Unlike the light of the stained-glass window which is projected onto the undulating surfaces of Gothic pillars and walls, the lens of the camera reduces an

image in successive moments onto a flat and as yet unvariegated surface. In light of the fact that *film* connotes a translucent *membrane*, one cannot help but recall that well known etching by Albrecht Dürer concerning verisimilitude in drawing. The correspondence between the transparent membrane in Dürer's drawing, and a still of film frame is striking; both can be thought of as a sectional cut through the 'cone of vision' projected from/to the lens of the eye or from/to the lens of the camera respectively. Film is thus a section which laminates three dimensionality onto an immeasurably flat plane, and it does so with such virtuality that it is no wonder that what is enlarged on the screen is mistaken as 'real', that the imagic and symbolic dimensions of film are so often, so ironically obscured.

Film's most profound attribute is, of course, motion - motion made permanent. How curious then, that the film camera, which affords the disembodied 'view', should seem capable of exploring, through movement, the relations of spatiality by which an embodied being comes to know the world. It investigates continuously the significance of architectonic relationships: up, over, down, across, from above, from below... in varying modalities of depth. This is the true significance of *parallax*, a technical term in film for the attainment of depth as a function of the moving camera. It is due to the motion of the 'privileged point of view' - now accessible to all, thanks to the camera - which records the apparent displacements of things in the world, that the inherent flatness of this medium is vanquished, and the '3/4 depth', which John Hejduk describes, is achieved. Film explores the relations of depth in ways both familiar and strange, in ways that both open up and close down the imaginable. Panning, rolling, tilting, tracking; focus, cut, action, dissolve. The motion of film delights and *moves* us.

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Nonetheless, the audience is 'glued' to their seats, 'riveted' to the screen. This is the most challenging limit of film: the limit of our participation. Perhaps the essence of modernity is this: that we experience more and more movement while we move our own bodies less and less. The world is whooshed through our living rooms via the television; we travel in cars and planes; we take escalators, elevators, moving sidewalks, and soon computers will flash up books, shop for us, make our drawings, and perhaps even bathe our passive bodies. Film, unlike architecture, can only be a *macchina mirabilis*, unable to involve our bodily participation as does the *macchina eroica*. Only Architecture is truly both contemplation and ritual; only she can prompt us to move our body in a profound engagement with the world.

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